

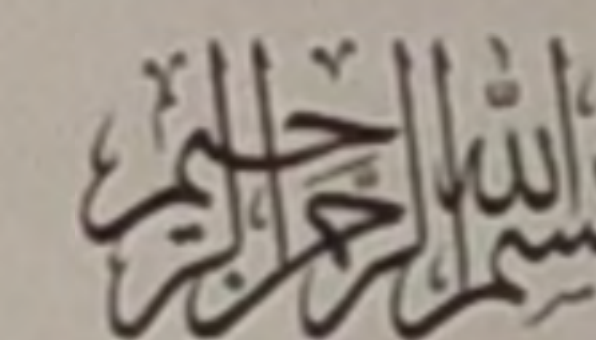
The Status of
WOMEN
in Light of the
SĪRAH

Shaykh Muhammad
Saleem Dhorat ḥafīzahullāh

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	v
Studying the Sīrah	1
The First Believer	2
A Remarkable Woman	3
Womankind Honoured	5
Early Muslimāt	7
Understanding Differences	9
Kindness towards Women	10
Preferred Paths	11
Effective Government	13
An Unfortunate Misunderstanding	14

Respect Across the Board	16
The Daughter	16
The Sister	18
The Wife	19
The Mother	23
Abū Hurayrah's ﷺ Devotion to his Mother	24
Compassion and Obedience	25
The Invaluable Contribution of the Mother	26
<i>Imām Shāfi'ī ﷺ and his Mother</i>	27
<i>Imām Bukhārī ﷺ and his Mother</i>	28
<i>Shaykh Abul-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Nadwī ﷺ and his Mother</i>	28
True Worth	31



Foreword

Numerous verses of the Glorious Qur'ān and aḥādīth of Rasūlullāh ﷺ lay out the rights and responsibilities of women in Islām. Study reveals that Islām has given women honour, dignity and status in society. It is unfortunate therefore, that in today's world there are few subjects as misunderstood and as clouded by misconceptions as the status of women in Islām.

Lack of authentic Islamic knowledge is one of the factors contributing to this state of affairs; therefore, it is essential for people to turn to authentic sources for guidance.

Over the years, the founder of the IDA Shaykh Muhammad Saleem Dhorat ḥafīzahullāh has discussed the rights of women during many of his discourses, to an ever expanding audience of Muslims from all walks of life. The Shaykh has worked tirelessly to banish commonly held misconceptions on the subject and to encourage sisters in Islām to recognise their true worth.

Under Shaykh's guidance, the IDA has developed a number

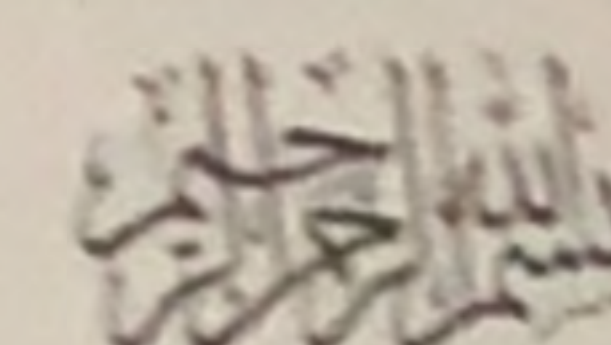
of educational and tarbiyah opportunities for Muslim sisters, including the introduction of an ālimiyyah course and regular talks and lectures. The text of this booklet is based on a number of these lectures, including the main lecture at the IDA's 10th Annual Sisters' Gathering 2007. In his inimitable style, Shaykh discusses women's contribution to Islām, gender roles and respect for women.

We are very fortunate indeed to have the chance to benefit from a great Islamic scholar and spiritual mentor - in fact the truly unique personality that is Shaykh Muhammad Saleem Dhorat ḥafīzahullāh. Whether through publications such as this, by sitting in his company or by listening to his many discourses and lectures, we all have the chance to make speedy progress in improving our understanding of Dīn and our relationship with our Creator.

Those who know Shaykh, even those who meet or talk to him for the first time, feel they have connected to the golden chain of our pious predecessors that stretches back to our beloved Prophet ﷺ. Shaykh's concern and love for every individual of the ummah, and his commitment to serving the Creation of Allāh ﷻ bring to mind the great saints of the past.

May Allāh ﷻ bless Shaykh with the best of rewards for his hard work and concern for the ummah, and may this booklet help educate and inspire and be a means of hidāyah for all who read it. And may Allāh ﷻ maintain Shaykh's pleasant shade over us, with āfiyah and good health, for many years to come. Āmīn.

Sulaymān Bhula
Muḥarram 1430AH



Studying the Sīrah

The life of Rasūlullāh ﷺ - the Sīrah - illuminates every area of human experience and provides valuable guidance to seekers of truth in every age. It is an open book inviting every human being to study and benefit from it. Every word spoken by Rasūlullāh ﷺ invites towards guidance, moderation and justice, and his behaviour and the way he interacted with people provide an easy to imitate blueprint for a wholesome and happy social life. No segment of society has been ignored and the rights and duties of each have been demonstrated.

A study of the sīrah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ is indispensable for Muslim sisters who wish to learn about their roles, responsibilities and status. As a result of their study, they will see through the many generally held misconceptions about women in Islām, and as a result strengthen their connection with Allāh ﷻ. In addition, when a Muslim sister learns the favours Allāh ﷻ has conferred on her, and the honour that is hers, she will be encouraged to increase her efforts to obey her Creator and develop greater love for Him.

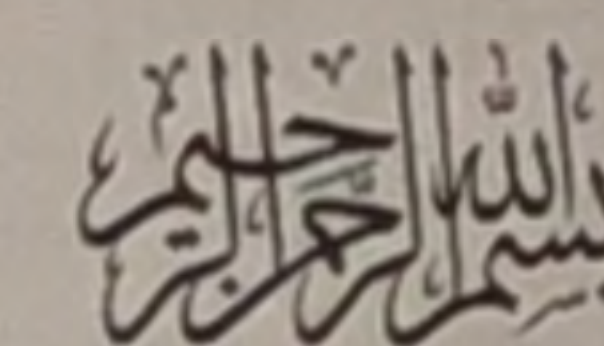
of educational and tarbiyah opportunities for Muslim sisters, including the introduction of an ālimiyyah course and regular talks and lectures. The text of this booklet is based on a number of these lectures, including the main lecture at the IDA's 10th Annual Sisters' Gathering 2007. In his inimitable style, Shaykh discusses women's contribution to Islām, gender roles and respect for women.

We are very fortunate indeed to have the chance to benefit from a great Islamic scholar and spiritual mentor - in fact the truly unique personality that is Shaykh Muhammad Saleem Dhorat ḥafīzahullāh. Whether through publications such as this, by sitting in his company or by listening to his many discourses and lectures, we all have the chance to make speedy progress in improving our understanding of Dīn and our relationship with our Creator.

Those who know Shaykh, even those who meet or talk to him for the first time, feel they have connected to the golden chain of our pious predecessors that stretches back to our beloved Prophet ﷺ. Shaykh's concern and love for every individual of the ummah, and his commitment to serving the Creation of Allāh ﷻ bring to mind the great saints of the past.

May Allāh ﷻ bless Shaykh with the best of rewards for his hard work and concern for the ummah, and may this booklet help educate and inspire and be a means of hidāyah for all who read it. And may Allāh ﷻ maintain Shaykh's pleasant shade over us, with āfiyah and good health, for many years to come. Āmīn.

Sulaymān Bhula
Muḥarram 1430AH



Studying the Sīrah

The life of Rasūlullāh ﷺ - the Sīrah - illuminates every area of human experience and provides valuable guidance to seekers of truth in every age. It is an open book inviting every human being to study and benefit from it. Every word spoken by Rasūlullāh ﷺ invites towards guidance, moderation and justice, and his behaviour and the way he interacted with people provide an easy to imitate blueprint for a wholesome and happy social life. No segment of society has been ignored and the rights and duties of each have been demonstrated.

A study of the sīrah of Rasūlullāh ﷺ is indispensable for Muslim sisters who wish to learn about their roles, responsibilities and status. As a result of their study, they will see through the many generally held misconceptions about women in Islām, and as a result strengthen their connection with Allāh ﷻ. In addition, when a Muslim sister learns the favours Allāh ﷻ has conferred on her, and the honour that is hers, she will be encouraged to increase her efforts to obey her Creator and develop greater love for Him.

The First Believer

When Rasūlullāh ﷺ was forty years old, he was made a Messenger of Allāh ﷻ. The angel Jibrā'il ﷺ appeared before him in the cave of Ḥirā and taught him the opening verses of Sūrah-al-'Alaq: *Read in the name of your Lord Who created [everything]. He created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is most gracious, He who taught by the pen; He taught man what he did not know.*' (96:1-5) Revelation of the Glorious Qur'ān - the Word of Allāh ﷻ - had begun.

Everything connected to the Qur'ān, the Final Revelation from Allāh ﷻ to mankind, is outstanding. The heart it was revealed to belonged to the best of creation and the best of the Messengers; the angel who brought him the revelation - Jibrā'il ﷺ - is the greatest of the angels; the places it was revealed - Makkah and Madīnah - are the best in the world; it began in the best of months - Ramaḍān, on the best of nights - Laylat-ul-Qadr. Now, just imagine being in Makkah al-Mukarramah fourteen centuries ago; would it not be the greatest honour to be the first person to hear the new revelation from the lips of the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ?

Rasūlullāh ﷺ returned home to Makkah after his strange experience, and the first person he met was his noble wife Khadijah-al-Kubrā ﷺ. Now, Allāh ﷻ has power over everything and if He had so willed it, Abū Bakr ﷺ could have been the first person Rasūlullāh ﷺ met on his return from the cave. The support and affirmation of a trusted friend would have been a great comfort to Rasūlullāh ﷺ. Further, Allāh ﷻ knew that Abū Bakr ﷺ was to go on to become a Muslim and that he had

an intense love for Rasūlullāh ﷺ. He would remain a staunch companion of Rasūlullāh ﷺ through thick and thin, and even become his khalīfah when he departed from this world. In fact, Abū Bakr ﷺ would reach the status of being the best of people after the Anbiyā ﷺ. It is not unreasonable to assume that a meeting of these two close companions would have been the most expedient outcome.

It was his wife Khadijah ﷺ, however, who he was to meet first; she was to be the first person to whom he related the occurrence in the cave of Ḥirā and the first person before whom he was to recite the first verses of the Glorious Qur'ān.

The first person to hear the Qur'ān from the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ was a woman. Allāh ﷻ reserved this honour for the female sex, and no one can ever change that fact.

Imām Bukhārī ﷺ and others report the conversation that took place on that unique occasion. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: "I fear that something may happen to me." Khadijah ﷺ immediately replied: "Never! By Allāh, Allāh will never disgrace you." She then went on to reassure Rasūlullāh ﷺ: "You maintain the ties of kinship, help the weak and destitute, are hospitable to people and assist those stricken by calamity."

A Remarkable Woman

Just consider the qualities of this noble woman; what an insight she had into the life of Rasūlullāh ﷺ that enabled her to iterate the noblest qualities he possessed. How, she argued, can the Creator forsake one who has such compassion for His

The First Believer

When Rasūlullāh ﷺ was forty years old, he was made a Messenger of Allāh ﷻ. The angel Jibrā'il ﷺ appeared before him in the cave of Ḥirā and taught him the opening verses of Sūrah-al-'Alaq: *Read in the name of your Lord Who created [everything]. He created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is most gracious, He who taught by the pen; He taught man what he did not know.*' (96:1-5) Revelation of the Glorious Qur'ān - the Word of Allāh ﷻ - had begun.

Everything connected to the Qur'ān, the Final Revelation from Allāh ﷻ to mankind, is outstanding. The heart it was revealed to belonged to the best of creation and the best of the Messengers; the angel who brought him the revelation - Jibrā'il ﷺ - is the greatest of the angels; the places it was revealed - Makkah and Madīnah - are the best in the world; it began in the best of months - Ramaḍān, on the best of nights - Laylat-ul-Qadr. Now, just imagine being in Makkah al-Mukarramah fourteen centuries ago; would it not be the greatest honour to be the first person to hear the new revelation from the lips of the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ?

Rasūlullāh ﷺ returned home to Makkah after his strange experience, and the first person he met was his noble wife Khadījah-al-Kubrā ﷺ. Now, Allāh ﷻ has power over everything and if He had so willed it, Abū Bakr ﷺ could have been the first person Rasūlullāh ﷺ met on his return from the cave. The support and affirmation of a trusted friend would have been a great comfort to Rasūlullāh ﷺ. Further, Allāh ﷻ knew that Abū Bakr ﷺ was to go on to become a Muslim and that he had

an intense love for Rasūlullāh ﷺ. He would remain a staunch companion of Rasūlullāh ﷺ through thick and thin, and even become his khalīfah when he departed from this world. In fact, Abū Bakr ﷺ would reach the status of being the best of people after the Anbiyā ﷺ. It is not unreasonable to assume that a meeting of these two close companions would have been the most expedient outcome.

It was his wife Khadījah ﷺ, however, who he was to meet first; she was to be the first person to whom he related the occurrence in the cave of Ḥirā and the first person before whom he was to recite the first verses of the Glorious Qur'ān.

The first person to hear the Qur'ān from the Messenger of Allāh ﷻ was a woman. Allāh ﷻ reserved this honour for the female sex, and no one can ever change that fact.

Imām Bukhārī ﷺ and others report the conversation that took place on that unique occasion. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: "I fear that something may happen to me." Khadījah ﷺ immediately replied: "Never! By Allāh, Allāh will never disgrace you." She then went on to reassure Rasūlullāh ﷺ: "You maintain the ties of kinship, help the weak and destitute, are hospitable to people and assist those stricken by calamity."

A Remarkable Woman

Just consider the qualities of this noble woman; what an insight she had into the life of Rasūlullāh ﷺ that enabled her to iterate the noblest qualities he possessed. How, she argued, can the Creator forsake one who has such compassion for His

Creation? Her words of reassurance encouraged and soothed Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

She could at that stage have gone for Abū Bakr ؓ and handed responsibility over to him, but Allāh ﷻ wanted to show the world, right from the onset, the great status and potential of women in Islām.

She left him sleeping peacefully, covered in a sheet, and made straight for her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian and a scholar of Divine Scripture. She recounted to him privately what had happened, whereupon Waraqah realised that Muḥammad ﷺ was the Final Messenger of Allāh ﷻ. He reassured his cousin that there was nothing to fear, so she returned to her husband and when he awoke, she repeated her assurances and suggested that he relate his experience to the knowledgeable Waraqah. She took him to her cousin and he related what had happened in the cave. After listening to the events, Waraqah said: "This is the same angel [Jibra'īl ؑ] that Allāh sent to Mūsā."

Just how significant and critical Khadījah's ؓ role was in the story of Islām can be gauged by how often Rasūlullāh ﷺ used to remember her in his later life. His wife 'Ā'ishah ؓ once said: "It is as if there is not a woman in the world except Khadījah!" Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: "Khadījah was such and such," (Bukhārī) which, according to 'Allāmah Yūsuf Binnori ؒ, encapsulates her whole life in a short sentence: it means that if he were to enumerate her qualities, the list would be endless!

Rasūlullāh ﷺ also said:

...قَدْ آمَنْتُ بِي إِذْ كَفَرَبِي النَّاسُ وَصَدَّقْتَنِي إِذْ كَذَّبَنِي النَّاسُ وَوَأَسْتَنِي بِمَالِهَا إِذْ حَرَمَنِي النَّاسُ... (احمد)

...She believed in me at a time when people disbelieved in me; she gave credence to me when people accused me of lying and she supported me with her wealth when people withheld support from me... (Aḥmad)

Indeed, the following ḥadīth indicates just how superior her status was. Abū Hurayrah ؓ said:

أَتَى جِبْرِيلُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ هَذِهِ خَدِيجَةُ قَدْ أَتَتْ مَعَهَا إِنَاءٌ فِيهِ إِدَامٌ أَوْ طَعَامٌ أَوْ شَرَابٌ فَإِذَا هِيَ أَتَتْكَ فَأَقْرَأْ عَلَيْهَا السَّلَامَ مِنْ رَبِّهَا وَمِنِّي وَبَشِّرْهَا بِبَيْتٍ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مِنْ قَصَبٍ لَا صَخَبَ فِيهِ وَلَا نَصَبَ (البخارى)

Jibra'īl ؑ once came to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and said: "This is Khadījah approaching and she has with her a vessel containing food or drink. When she reaches you, convey greetings to her from her Lord and from me, and give her the glad tidings of a house in Jannah made of jewels, in which there will be no noise and no toil." (Muslim)

Womankind Honoured

A close analysis of the events following the first revelation reveals a number of significant facts:

1. The first person Allāh ﷻ chose to help and support Rasūlullāh ﷺ after the crown of risālah was placed on his blessed head was Khadījah ؓ, a woman. He did not choose a man.

Creation? Her words of reassurance encouraged and soothed Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

She could at that stage have gone for Abū Bakr ؓ and handed responsibility over to him, but Allāh ﷻ wanted to show the world, right from the onset, the great status and potential of women in Islām.

She left him sleeping peacefully, covered in a sheet, and made straight for her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian and a scholar of Divine Scripture. She recounted to him privately what had happened, whereupon Waraqah realised that Muḥammad ﷺ was the Final Messenger of Allāh ﷻ. He reassured his cousin that there was nothing to fear, so she returned to her husband and when he awoke, she repeated her assurances and suggested that he relate his experience to the knowledgeable Waraqah. She took him to her cousin and he related what had happened in the cave. After listening to the events, Waraqah said: "This is the same angel [Jibra'il ؑ] that Allāh sent to Mūsā."

Just how significant and critical Khadījah's ؓ role was in the story of Islām can be gauged by how often Rasūlullāh ﷺ used to remember her in his later life. His wife 'Ā'ishah ؓ once said: "It is as if there is not a woman in the world except Khadījah!" Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: "Khadījah was such and such," (Bukhārī) which, according to 'Allāmah Yūsuf Binnori ؒ, encapsulates her whole life in a short sentence: it means that if he were to enumerate her qualities, the list would be endless!

Rasūlullāh ﷺ also said:

...فَدَامَتْ بِي إِذْ كَفَرْتُ بِالنَّاسِ وَصَدَّقْتَنِي إِذْ كَذَّبَنِي النَّاسُ وَوَأَسْتَنِي بِمَالِهَا إِذْ حَرَمَنِي النَّاسُ... (أحمد)

...She believed in me at a time when people disbelieved in me; she gave credence to me when people accused me of lying and she supported me with her wealth when people withheld support from me... (Aḥmad)

Indeed, the following ḥadīth indicates just how superior her status was. Abū Hurayrah ؓ said:

أَتَى جِبْرِيلُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ هَذِهِ خَدِيجَةُ قَدْ آتَتْ مَعَهَا إِنَاءً فِيهِ إِدَامٌ أَوْ طَعَامٌ أَوْ شَرَابٌ فَإِذَا هِيَ أَتَتْكَ فَأَقْرِأْ عَلَيْهَا السَّلَامَ مِنْ رَبِّهَا وَمَنِّي وَبَشِّرْهَا بِبَيْتٍ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مِنْ قَصَبٍ لَا صُحْبَ فِيهِ وَلَا نَصَبٍ (البخاري)

Jibra'il ؑ once came to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and said: "This is Khadījah approaching and she has with her a vessel containing food or drink. When she reaches you, convey greetings to her from her Lord and from me, and give her the glad tidings of a house in Jannah made of jewels, in which there will be no noise and no toil." (Muslim)

Womankind Honoured

A close analysis of the events following the first revelation reveals a number of significant facts:

1. The first person Allāh ﷻ chose to help and support Rasūlullāh ﷺ after the crown of risālah was placed on his blessed head was Khadījah ؓ, a woman. He did not choose a man.

Creation? Her words of reassurance encouraged and soothed Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

She could at that stage have gone for Abū Bakr ؓ and handed responsibility over to him, but Allāh ﷻ wanted to show the world, right from the onset, the great status and potential of women in Islām.

She left him sleeping peacefully, covered in a sheet, and made straight for her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian and a scholar of Divine Scripture. She recounted to him privately what had happened, whereupon Waraqah realised that Muḥammad ﷺ was the Final Messenger of Allāh ﷻ. He reassured his cousin that there was nothing to fear, so she returned to her husband and when he awoke, she repeated her assurances and suggested that he relate his experience to the knowledgeable Waraqah. She took him to her cousin and he related what had happened in the cave. After listening to the events, Waraqah said: "This is the same angel [Jibra'īl ؑ] that Allāh sent to Mūsā."

Just how significant and critical Khadījah's ؓ role was in the story of Islām can be gauged by how often Rasūlullāh ﷺ used to remember her in his later life. His wife 'Ā'ishah ؓ once said: "It is as if there is not a woman in the world except Khadījah!" Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: "Khadījah was such and such," (Bukhārī) which, according to 'Allāmah Yūsuf Binnori ؒ, encapsulates her whole life in a short sentence: it means that if he were to enumerate her qualities, the list would be endless!

Rasūlullāh ﷺ also said:

...قَدْ آمَنْتُ بِي إِذْ كَفَرَ بِيَ النَّاسُ وَ صَدَّقْتَنِي إِذْ كَذَّبَنِي النَّاسُ وَوَأَسْتَنِي بِمَالِهَا إِذْ حَرَمَنِي النَّاسُ... (أحمد)

...She believed in me at a time when people disbelieved in me; she gave credence to me when people accused me of lying and she supported me with her wealth when people withheld support from me... (Aḥmad)

Indeed, the following ḥadīth indicates just how superior her status was. Abū Hurayrah ؓ said:

أَتَى جِبْرِيلُ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ هَذِهِ خَدِيجَةُ قَدْ أَتَتْ مَعَهَا إِنَاءٌ فِيهِ إِدَامٌ أَوْ طَعَامٌ أَوْ شَرَابٌ فَإِذَا هِيَ أَتَتْكَ فَأَقْرَأْ عَلَيْهَا السَّلَامَ مِنْ رَبِّهَا وَ مِنِّي وَ بَشِّرْهَا بِبَيْتٍ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مِنْ قَصَبٍ لَا صَخَبَ فِيهِ وَلَا نَصَبَ (البخاري)

Jibra'īl ؑ once came to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and said: "This is Khadījah approaching and she has with her a vessel containing food or drink. When she reaches you, convey greetings to her from her Lord and from me, and give her the glad tidings of a house in Jannah made of jewels, in which there will be no noise and no toil." (Muslim)

Womankind Honoured

A close analysis of the events following the first revelation reveals a number of significant facts:

1. The first person Allāh ﷻ chose to help and support Rasūlullāh ﷺ after the crown of risālah was placed on his blessed head was Khadījah ؓ, a woman. He did not choose a man.

2. The first person to hear about the mission of Rasūlullāh ﷺ was a woman.
3. The first person to hear verses of Allāh's ﷻ Last Revelation from the lips of His Messenger ﷺ was a woman, not a man.
4. When His beloved Messenger ﷺ underwent the unfamiliar experience of revelation for the first time, Allāh ﷻ chose a woman to reassure, sooth and encourage him.
5. A woman applied such an intelligent and wise argument that even a Messenger of Allāh was consoled and encouraged by it.
6. At a time of stress for her husband, a woman took the initiative to try to resolve the issue. She chose to consult the best and most authentic authority, and one whom she could trust with delicate matters. If there had been anything amiss with her husband (we seek refuge with Allāh ﷻ from such assertions), she was confident that the private matter would not have been made public.
7. The first person to become a Muslim, according to the majority of the scholars, was Khadījah ؓ, a woman. The probability of this is very great for she was the closest person to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and the first to hear and understand about his mission.
8. Further, the sīrah reveals that the person who spent the most wealth in the path of Allāh ﷻ in the early days of Islām was Khadījah ؓ, a woman.

These few points themselves are sufficient to show the high

position in which Islām holds women. If Islām discriminated against women, Allāh ﷻ would surely have given these honours to a man.

Early Muslimāt

As time went on and more people gradually entered the fold of Islām, women continued to play an important part in the mission of Rasūlullāh ﷺ.

Persecution intensified at the hands of the idolaters of Makkah and the small peaceful community of Muslims were harassed and injured, solely on the basis that they had left their ancestral religion. During this phase, Allāh ﷻ chose a woman, Sumayyah ؓ, the mother of Ammār ibn Yāsir ؓ, to be the first shahīd in Islām.

The fact is that Allāh ﷻ has not kept women back in any area where greatness and honour are to be found. In the field of knowledge, women have played a significant role throughout the history of Islām. The archetype of female scholarship is the mother of the believers, 'Ā'ishah ؓ. Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal ؓ, a leading scholar of ḥadīth, writes that there are six Ṣaḥābah, known as *mukthirīn fil-ḥadīth*, who have narrated the most number of aḥādīth. 'Ā'ishah ؓ is one of these. Senior Ṣaḥābah and tābi'īn would go to consult her on matters of religious knowledge. She would listen to their arguments from behind a veil and they would request her to resolve their issues. Her scholarly standing was so high that she would comment on the rulings of the most senior Ṣaḥābah ؓ. Regarding an opinion of 'Umar ؓ that once reached her she is reported to

have expressed her scholarly disagreement with it, saying: "Allāh have mercy on 'Umar! By Allāh, Rasūlullāh ﷺ did not say..." (Al-Bukhārī)

Understanding Differences

The blessings of Allāh ﷻ on His servants are so numerous that we are unable to count them. The share in these blessings reserved for men is equal to that reserved for women; Allāh ﷻ does not discriminate between the sexes when distributing His blessings and mercy. A woman can attain the same reward and closeness to Allāh ﷻ through her devotions that a man can attain.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً

طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

Whoever, male or female, has acted righteously, while being a believer, We will certainly make him live a good life, and will give such people their reward for the best of what they used to do. (16:97)

In worldly dealings and social interaction, Allāh ﷻ has given rights to both sexes; men have been given rights over women and women have been given rights over men.

...وَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ...

...Women have rights similar to what they owe, in recognised manner... (2:228)

The rights of women and men are similar, though for worldly expediencies Allāh ﷻ has, through His wisdom, given men one level of authority above that which He has given women.

...وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَ دَرَجَةٌ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٩﴾

...though men have a degree above them. And Allāh is Mighty, Wise. (2:228)

This single degree of difference ends at the grave, as it is for the merely utilitarian purpose of enabling the smooth running of human activity in the world. After passing on to the next and everlasting world, the need ends and there is absolute equality between the genders. As Muslims, we do not question the right of Allāh ﷻ to organise affairs in this way, and we are certain that there is Divine Wisdom behind it. Indeed, Allāh ﷻ ends the verse by reminding us that He is Ḥakīm, the Wise.

Kindness towards Women

Problems arise when we look only at a few isolated issues concerning women in Islām. This blinkered approach is to blame, otherwise if the whole picture is taken into consideration, the conclusion will unfalteringly be reached that far from favouring men, Allāh ﷻ has in fact treated both with fairness and kindness. Examples can be cited where Allāh ﷻ has conferred special favours on women.

The obligation of ṣalāh with congregation is one such example: men are required to perform ṣalāh in congregation whereas the ṣalāh of a woman at home is more rewarding for her. This does not diminish her worth or reward, but is a special kindness. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

لَا صَلَاةَ لِجَارِ الْمَسْجِدِ إِلَّا فِي الْمَسْجِدِ (الدارقطني)

There is no ṣalāh for one who lives near a masjid except in the masjid (Al-Dār Qutnī)

The muḥaddithīn explain that if a man offers ṣalāh in his home without a valid reason for not attending the masjid, the

obligation of the ṣalāh will be lifted from him but he will receive no reward for it. Furthermore, Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

صَلَاةُ الرَّجُلِ فِي الْجَمَاعَةِ تُضَعَّفُ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِ فِي بَيْتِهِ وَفِي سُوقِهِ
خَمْسًا وَعِشْرِينَ ضِعْفًا... (بخاری)

The ṣalāh of a man with congregation is twenty-five times better than his ṣalāh in his house or in the marketplace [alone]. (Bukhārī)

So, a man has to perform wuḍū, step out of the house, possibly into the freezing cold or the sweltering heat, go to the masjid, wait for the appointed time, and then perform ṣalāh in order to get the full reward. As for women, Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

صَلَاةُ الْمَرْأَةِ وَحْدَهَا تُفْضَلُ عَلَى صَلَاتِهَا فِي الْجَمْعِ بِخَمْسٍ وَعِشْرِينَ
دَرَجَةً (الجامع الصغير)

The ṣalāh of a woman on her own is twenty-five times better than her ṣalāh in congregation. (Al-Jāmi'-al-Saghīr)

Another example is the reward given to women during the menses, when they are unable to perform ṣalāh. A woman who is regular with her ṣalāh earns the full reward for performing ṣalāh during the days when she is unable to.

Preferred Paths

Muslims admit frankly that in the sphere of worldly functionality Allāh ﷻ has created men and women with certain differences, which in turn have an effect on the roles it is fair to impose on them. Modernity shows by practical example the very same phenomenon.

In a pure society where Allāh ﷻ is loved and feared, men and women, in accordance to their natural dispositions, will tend to different lifestyles. In a godless, materialistic society that exerts all manner of external pressures, desires and ambitions change, though contentment and peace seldom result. In this respect, modernity has let women down instead of giving them progress.

Allāh ﷻ has, as a whole, made certain characteristics specific to particular genders. Physical strength is one area where men have, in general, been endowed with a greater share than women. Of course, there are exceptions, and the existence of women who are physically superior to men does not negate the general pattern. Similarly, men have a natural advantage over women when it comes to taking decisions under stress. When the crunch comes and a life or death decision needs to be made, men as a whole, have been endowed with greater abilities than women. Emotion and fear bear less on a man in such situations than they do on a woman. History shows that very few, if any, women have ever held military posts in which split-second life and death decisions have to be made.

Although there are many women who dominate their husbands and have their own way at all times, in times of crisis and danger they step back and put their husbands in the driving seat. It cannot be denied that the qualities of physical courage and valour are more predominant in men than in women. In addition, when family disputes arise, domineering women tend to put their husbands forward to represent their interests.

Again, it should be stressed that there are exceptions where women excel over men in all fields but the general and majority

position is what is under discussion here.

Effective Government

In all spiritual aspects of life and in the majority of worldly affairs too, men and women are equal. As far as the organisation of worldly affairs goes, it is a fact that in any organisation or group not every individual can be on an equal footing. If it were possible then every Member of Parliament would have the same status, instead of there being a hierarchy of Prime Minister, cabinet ministers etc. To claim that the appointment of one MP as prime minister discriminates against all the others, or that it flies in the face of equality, is absurd; it is obvious that in any unit of human organisation there has to be an individual whose role it is to take the final decisions.

A home is also a government, but on a micro scale: bringing up children, schooling, housework and peaceful coexistence all require sound policies and good governance. The husband and father is given the responsibility of being the prime minister, and the wife and mother has the role of a senior minister. After consultation and discussion, the time comes for taking a decision, and this can only humanly be done by one person. Similarly, if agreement cannot be reached on a particular matter, one party must have the power of veto to enable life to carry on. Islām has given this responsibility to the man. It is obvious that if both husband and wife were on an equal footing in this regard, the efficient running of the house would be impossible. No sovereign state can function if there are two leaders with the same powers and authority.

Needless to say, contradictory views also exist, but they often turn out to have some ulterior motive. The obvious and most easily recognisable motives are selfishness and lust. Women are encouraged to recognise no differences between gender roles and so be fully available for men's exploitation and gratification. Ironically, this form of 'equality' results in an environment of even greater inequality, where women have to sacrifice their modesty and become objects of lust for men, who themselves sacrifice nothing and only gain. A simple demonstration of the 'respect' modernity gives to women is the fact that not even the smallest product can be marketed without the use of the female image to channel the emotions of male consumers.

Islām has secured respect for women and their right to maintain modesty. It has given them a very high status in society. Its principles ensure that women are protected from any situation that would otherwise compel them to compromise their modesty, and in addition, its principles ensure that women can live full and productive lives without having to sacrifice their self-respect. Allāh ﷻ sets limits in all areas of life, for both men and women, because it is human nature to be tempted to stray into harmful areas. The limits particular to women are there only so they can avoid getting entangled in situations that would violate their dignity and honour.

An Unfortunate Misunderstanding

Detractors of Islām may try to argue that rather than respecting women, Islām actually degrades and demonises them. In support of their claims they will present sayings of Rasūlullāh ﷺ such

as: "I have not left behind me a fitnah [trial/tribulation] that is more harmful to men than that of women," (Bukhārī) or: "Protect yourselves from women." (ibid) By doing so, they end up exposing their failure to understand the meaning and intent of such sayings.

There is absolutely no misogyny or bigotry in such sayings; instead, they have two aims:

1. For any particular man, a non-maḥram woman is a potential fitnah. As for those women who are maḥrams, e.g. mother, sister, daughter, wife, they have been described by Rasūlullāh ﷺ in the most honourable terms. One man's mother is a fitnah for another man, yet for him she is a doorway to Paradise; his daughter is a fitnah for another man, but for him she is a gift from Allāh ﷻ to be loved and cherished; his wife is a fitnah for others, yet for him she is a source of peace. So it is only in terms of a man involving himself unlawfully with a non-maḥram woman that she has been described using words of warning, otherwise such aḥādīth do not imply that there is any intrinsic deficiency in women.
2. Aḥādīth such as the aforementioned ones are intended to act as a warning to men not to direct covetous looks at women. This is a protective measure for women that helps protect them from the evil advances of men.

It is clear therefore, that the teachings of Islām in no way aim to degrade women. This is obviously the case, as there are countless teachings of Islām that honour women in society, and it is impossible for a religion to both honour and degrade women at the same time.

Respect Across the Board

An idea of just how much respect women are granted in Islām can be gained by studying the various roles a woman has throughout her life, the most common being within the family circle. By taking the examples of daughter, sister, wife and mother, we can learn from the practices and teachings of our beloved Prophet ﷺ how a Muslim should behave towards the female servants of Allāh ﷻ and the high regard in which they are held in Islām.

The Daughter

First, a woman is a daughter. In the days of ignorance, before the coming of Rasūlullāh ﷺ, the social norm in Arab society was to dread the birth of a girl. Allāh ﷻ states the common reaction to the news of a daughter:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنْثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴿٥٨﴾
يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِن سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَبِهِ ۚ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ ﴿٥٩﴾
أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ ۚ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

When one of them is given the good news of a daughter, his face darkens and he is choked with grief. He hides from people because of [what he presumes as] the bad news given to him. [He wonders:] Should he keep it despite the disgrace or bury it in the dust? Evil it is that they decide. (16:58-59)

Many men used to abandon their homes to avoid imaginary disgrace, while others used to have their newborn daughters buried alive. Many, who kept their daughters, still regarded them as ill-omened.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ put an end to this perverted thinking. In fact, through his teachings the birth of a daughter was transformed into an occasion of joy. Ibn ‘Abbās ؓ narrates that Rasūlullāh ﷺ promised:

مَنْ وَلَدَتْ لَهُ ابْنَةٌ فَلَمْ يَدْخُلْ بِهَا الْجَنَّةَ (أحمد)

Whoever has a daughter and does not bury her alive, does not treat her with disdain, and does not favour his son over her, Allāh will enter him into Paradise because of her. (Ahmad)

Anas ibn Mālik ؓ narrates that Rasūlullāh ﷺ promised:

مَنْ عَالَ جَارِيتَيْنِ حَتَّىٰ تَبْلُغَا جَاءَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَنَا وَهُوَ وَضَمَّ أَصَابِعَهُ (مسلم)

Whoever brings up two daughters until they reach maturity, he and I will be like this on the day of Qiyāmah (and he held up his hand with his first two fingers together). (Muslim)

Knowing the love the Ṣaḥābah ؓ had for Rasūlullāh ﷺ it is clear that they would have longed for a second daughter after the birth of their first.

Daughters are held in such regard, and good treatment towards them is encouraged to such an extent, that Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

مَنْ أُبْتُلِيَ مِنَ الْبَنَاتِ بِشَيْءٍ فَأَحْسَنَ إِلَيْهِنَّ كُنَّ لَهُ سِتْرًا مِنَ النَّارِ (مسلم)

Whoever goes through trials due to a daughter, yet treats her well, she will be a shield for him from the Fire. (Muslim)

Daughters are not responsible for earning their own living and so the father may go through financial hardship while bringing

Respect Across the Board

An idea of just how much respect women are granted in Islam can be gained by studying the various roles a woman has throughout her life, the most common being within the family circle. By taking the examples of daughter, sister, wife and mother, we can learn from the practices and teachings of our beloved Prophet ﷺ how a Muslim should behave towards the female servants of Allah ﷻ and the high regard in which they are held in Islam.

The Daughter

First, a woman is a daughter. In the days of ignorance, before the coming of Rasūlullāh ﷺ, the social norm in Arab society was to dread the birth of a girl. Allah ﷻ states the common reaction to the news of a daughter:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُمْ بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَافٍ ۚ
يَتَوَدَّى مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِن سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَبِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ
أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

When one of them is given the good news of a daughter, his face darkens and he is choked with grief. He hides from his people because of [what he presumes as] the bad news given to him. [He wonders:] Should he keep it despite the disgrace, or bury it in the dust? Evil it is that they decide. (16:58-59)

Many men used to abandon their homes to avoid imaginary disgrace, while others used to have their newborn daughters buried alive. Many, who kept their daughters, still regarded them as ill-omened.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ put an end to this perverted thinking. In fact, through his teachings the birth of a daughter was transformed into an occasion of joy. Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ narrates that Rasūlullāh ﷺ promised:

مَنْ وَلَدَتْ لَهُ ابْنَةً فَلَمْ يَدْفَعْهَا وَلَمْ يُهِنِّهَا وَلَمْ يُؤْزِرْ وَلَدَهَا عَلَيْهَا بَعَثَ
الْمَلَكُ أَدْخُلْهُ اللَّهُ بِهَا الْجَنَّةَ ۖ

Whoever has a daughter and does not bury her alive, does not treat her with disdain, and does not favour his son over her, Allah will enter him into Paradise because of her. (Ahmad)

Anas ibn Mālik ﷺ narrates that Rasūlullāh ﷺ promised:

مَنْ عَالَ حَارِثَتَيْنِ حَتَّىٰ تَبْلُغَا جَاءَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَنَا وَهُوَ وَصُمَّ اصْبَاعُهُ ۖ
Whoever brings up two daughters until they reach maturity, he and I will be like this on the day of Qiyamah (and he held up his hand with his first two fingers together). (Muslim)

Knowing the love the Ṣaḥābah ﷺ had for Rasūlullāh ﷺ it is clear that they would have longed for a second daughter after the birth of their first.

Daughters are held in such regard, and good treatment towards them is encouraged to such an extent, that Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

مَنْ أَتَتْهُ مِنَ السَّنَةِ بِشْيٌ فَأَحْسَنَ إِلَيْهَا كُنَّ لَهُ بَيْتًا مِنَ النَّارِ ۖ
Whoever goes through trials due to a daughter, yet treats her well, she will be a shield for him from the Fire. (Muslim)

Daughters are not responsible for earning their own living and so the father may go through financial hardship while bringing

her up. He is also responsible for her protection. Islām orders fathers to cheerfully bear these responsibilities and treat their daughters well.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ treated his daughters with great love and respect. It is reported in the books of ḥadīth that whenever Rasūlullāh ﷺ would return from a journey he would alight at the masjid and offer two raka'āt of ṣalāh. Thereafter, the first thing he would do is visit his daughter Fāṭimah ؓ. (Al-Ḥākim)

Before the Battle of Badr, his daughter Ruqayyah ؓ was very ill. His love and concern for her prompted him to order his son-in-law 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān ؓ to stay behind in Madīnah and care for her. (Al-Bukhārī)

The Sister

Rasūlullāh ﷺ did not have a biological sister. Once when a group from the Banū Sa'd came to Rasūlullāh ﷺ a woman came forward and declared that she was his sister. It turned out that she was Shīmā ؓ, the daughter of Rasūlullāh's wet-nurse Ḥālimah ؓ. Shīmā ؓ was thus his foster and childhood companion and playmate. She used to look up to him and would hold him in her lap and recite the following poem:

رَبَّنَا أَبْقِ أَخِي مُحَمَّدًا حَتَّى أَرَاهُ يَافِعًا وَآمُرَدًا
سَمَّ أَرَاهُ سَيِّدًا مُسَوِّدًا وَأُكَبِّتُ أَعَادِيهِ مَعًا وَالْحُسُودَا
وَأَعْطِهِ عِزًّا يَدُومُ أَبَدًا

Our Rabb, preserve my brother Muḥammad,
That I may see him as a grown up, a youth;
Then as an honoured chief,
his enemies and enviers all overthrown;
And grant him honour that lasts for ever.
(Sharh Al-Zurqāni 'alal-Mawāhib al-Laduniyyah)

Rasūlullāh ﷺ received his foster sister with the utmost honour; he removed his cloak, spread it on the ground for her to sit on, and humbly suggested that if she wished to remain with him, she would have a place of honour and respect.

The Wife

A woman's esteem increases even further when she becomes a wife. She now has the additional status of friend, associate, comforter and adviser to her husband. The contribution of Khadijah ؓ during the emotional occasion of the first Revelation has already been mentioned. Similarly, after the truce of Ḥudaybiyyah was struck and the Muslims had to return to Madīnah without performing 'umrah, it was Rasūlullāh's ﷺ wife Umm Salamah ؓ whose advice and counsel helped diffuse a difficult situation.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ told the Ṣaḥābah ؓ to sacrifice their animals and shave their heads and return to Al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah without performing 'umrah. The Ṣaḥābah ؓ did not respond, hoping that Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ, seeing their zeal to perform 'umrah, may change this command and grant them the privilege to perform 'umrah. They knew that once they shaved their heads and were out of iḥrām, there would remain

her up. He is also responsible for her protection. Islam orders fathers to cheerfully bear these responsibilities and treat their daughters well.

Rasulullah ﷺ treated his daughters with great love and respect. It is reported in the books of hadith that whenever Rasulullah ﷺ would return from a journey he would alight at the masjid and offer two raka'at of salah. Thereafter, the first thing he would do is visit his daughter Fatimah a.s. (Hakim)

Before the Battle of Badr, his daughter Ruqayyah a.s. was very ill. His love and concern for her prompted him to order his war-in-law 'Uthman ibn 'Affan a.s. to stay behind in Madinah and care for her. (Bukhari)

The Sister

Rasulullah ﷺ did not have a biological sister. Once however, when a group from the Banu Sa'd came to Rasulullah ﷺ, a woman came forward and declared that she was his sister. It turned out that she was Shimā a.s., the daughter of Rasulullah's wet-nurse Halimah a.s. Shimā a.s. was thus his foster sister and childhood companion and playmate. She used to look after him and would hold him in her lap and recite the following poem:

مَا رَمَتْهُ أُمِّي مَحْنَةً حَتَّىٰ أَرَاهُ يَفْعَلُ وَأَتَمَرُ
لَسْمُ أَرَاهُ نَيْدًا مَسُونًا وَأَكْبَتْ أَعَابِيهِ مَعَ الْخَنَدِ
وَأَعْطَتْهُ عِرًّا بِقُلُوبِ أَسَدِ

Our Rabb, preserve my brother Muhammad,
That I may see him as a grown up, a youth;
Then as an honoured chief,
his enemies and enviers all overthrown;
And grant him honour that lasts for ever.
(Sharh Al-Zurqani 'alal-Mawahib al-Laduniyyah)

Rasulullah ﷺ received his foster sister with the utmost honour; he removed his cloak, spread it on the ground for her to sit on, and humbly suggested that if she wished to remain with him, she would have a place of honour and respect.

The Wife

A woman's esteem increases even further when she becomes a wife. She now has the additional status of friend, associate, comforter and adviser to her husband. The contribution of Khadijah a.s. during the emotional occasion of the first Revelation has already been mentioned. Similarly, after the truce of Hudaibiyyah was struck and the Muslims had to return to Madinah without performing 'umrah, it was Rasulullah's ﷺ wife Umm Salamah a.s. whose advice and counsel helped diffuse a difficult situation.

Rasulullah ﷺ told the Sahābah a.s. to sacrifice their animals and shave their heads and return to Madinah Munawwarah without performing 'umrah. The Sahābah a.s. did not respond, hoping that Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ, seeing their zeal to perform 'umrah, may change this command and grant them the privilege to perform 'umrah. They knew that once they shaved their heads and were out of ihram, there would remain

no possibility. Perturbed, Rasūlullāh ﷺ went to Umm Salamah and told her of what he wished of his companions and the actual state of affairs. She advised him:

يَا نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ أَتَجِبُ ذَلِكَ أُخْرَجُ ثُمَّ لَا تُكَلِّمُ أَحَدًا مِنْهُمْ كَلِمَةً حَتَّى
تَنْحَرَ بَدْنَكَ وَتَدْعُوَ خَالِقَكَ فَيَحْلِقَكَ (البخاري)

O Messenger of Allāh, do you wish that? Then go out and do not say a word to anyone until you have sacrificed your animal and called your barber and he has shaved your head.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ followed her advice and shaved his head, effectively putting an end to any hopes of performing 'umrah. Seeing his actions the Ṣaḥābah accepted the situation and followed suit. (Al-Bukhārī)

Rasūlullāh ﷺ would spend quality time with his wives. He would talk and narrate stories (like the story of Umm Zar' reported by Imām Bukhārī), and also joke and engage in light-hearted conversation with them. 'Ā'ishah relates:

أَلَا لِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنِّي لَا أَعْلَمُ إِذَا كُنْتُ عَنِّي
ضِيَّةً وَإِذَا كُنْتُ عَلَيَّ غَضَبِي قَالَتْ فَقُلْتُ مَنْ أَيْنَ تَعْرِفُ ذَلِكَ فَقَالَ
مَا إِذَا كُنْتُ عَنِّي رَاضِيَةً فَإِنَّكَ تَقُولِينَ لَا وَرَبِّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَإِذَا كُنْتُ
عَلَيَّ غَضَبِي قُلْتُ لَا وَرَبِّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ قَالَتْ قُلْتُ أَجَلُ وَاللَّهِ يَا رَسُولَ
لِلَّهِ مَا أَهْجُرُ إِلَّا إِسْمَكَ (البخاري)

Rasūlullāh said to me, "Surely, I know when you are happy with me and when you are unhappy with me!" I asked,

"How do you know?" He said, "When you are happy with me you say: 'No, I swear by the Lord of Muḥammad!' and when you are displeased with me you say: 'No, I swear by the Lord of Ibrāhīm!'" I said, "Yes, O Messenger of Allāh. But it is only your name that I leave out." (Al-Bukhārī)

Husbands are strongly reminded that their wives are not servants; they are lifelong companions and friends. The fact that men have been made the head of the household is not a licence to be oppressive. A true leader is compassionate, sympathetic and loving, and shares the burden of his subordinates. 'Ā'ishah was asked, after Rasūlullāh's death, what he used to do at home when he was not at prayer. She replied:

يَكُونُ فِي مِهْنَةِ أَهْلِهِ تَعْنِي خِدْمَةَ أَهْلِهِ فَإِذَا حَضَرَتِ الصَّلَاةُ خَرَجَ
إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ (البخاري)

He would be engaged in serving his family, and when the time for ṣalāh would come, he would leave for ṣalāh. (Al-Bukhārī)

In another narration, she gives examples of how Rasūlullāh would help around the house:

كَانَ يُرْقِعُ الثَّوبَ وَيَخْصِفُ النَّعْلَ أَوْ نَحْوَ هَذَا (احمد)

He would sew clothes and mend shoes or other such tasks. (Aḥmad)

Men must remember that they will be questioned about how they exercise their position of authority in the home. Rasūlullāh said:

no possibility. Perturbed, Rasūlullāh ﷺ went to Umm Salamah ؓ and told her of what he wished of his companions and the actual state of affairs. She advised him:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ ذَلِكَ أَفْرَجُ لِمَ لَا تُكَلِّمُ أَحَدًا مِنْهُمْ كَلِمَةً حَتَّى
تَعْرِفَ بِذَلِكَ وَتَقْضِيَ حَاجَتَكَ فِيهِمْ

O Messenger of Allāh, do you wish that? Then go out and do not say a word to anyone until you have sacrificed your animal and called your barber and he has shaved your head.

Rasūlullāh ﷺ followed her advice and shaved his head, effectively putting an end to any hopes of performing 'umrah. Seeing his actions the Sahābah ؓ accepted the situation and followed suit. (Bukhārī)

Rasūlullāh ﷺ would spend quality time with his wives. He would talk and narrate stories (like the story of Umm Zar' reported by Imām Bukhārī ؓ), and also joke and engage in light-hearted conversation with them. 'Ā'ishah ؓ relates:

قَالَ لِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنِّي لَا أَعْلَمُ إِذَا كُنْتُ عَنِّي
رَاحِيَةً وَإِذَا كُنْتُ عَلَى غَضِيٍّ قَالَتْ فَقُلْتُ مَنْ أَيْنَ تَعْرِفُ ذَلِكَ فَقَالَ
إِنَّمَا إِذَا كُنْتُ عَنِّي رَاحِيَةً فَإِنَّكَ تَقُولِينَ لَا وَرَبِّ مُحَمَّدٍ وَإِذَا كُنْتُ
عَلَى غَضِيٍّ قُلْتُ لَا وَرَبِّ الْبَرَاءِ قَالَتْ فَقُلْتُ أَجَلُ وَاللَّهِ يَا رَسُولَ
اللَّهِ مَا أَفْخَرُ إِلَّا بِكَ

Rasūlullāh said to me, "Surely, I know when you are happy with me and when you are unhappy with me!" I asked,

"How do you know?" He said, "When you are happy with me you say: 'No, I swear by the Lord of Muhammad!' and when you are displeased with me you say: 'No, I swear by the Lord of Ibrahim!'" I said, "Yes, O Messenger of Allāh. But it is only your name that I leave out." (Bukhārī)

Husbands are strongly reminded that their wives are not servants; they are lifelong companions and friends. The fact that men have been made the head of the household is not a licence to be oppressive. A true leader is compassionate, sympathetic and loving, and shares the burden of his subordinates. 'Ā'ishah ؓ was asked, after Rasūlullāh's ﷺ death, what he used to do at home when he was not at prayer. She replied:

كَانَ يَكُونُ فِي مِهْنَةٍ أَعْلِيَةٍ تَعْنِي خِدْمَةَ أَهْلِهِ فَإِذَا خَفَضَتْ الصَّلَاةُ خَرَجَ
إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ

He would be engaged in serving his family, and when the time for ṣalāh would come, he would leave for ṣalāh. (Bukhārī)

In another narration, she gives examples of how Rasūlullāh ﷺ would help around the house:

كَانَ يُرْقِعُ الثَّوْبَ وَيَخْصِفُ التَّعْلَ أَوْ نَحْوَ هَذَا

He would sew clothes and mend shoes or other such tasks. (Ahmad)

Men must remember that they will be questioned about how they exercise their position of authority in the home. Rasūlullāh ﷺ said:

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ (البخارى)

Each one of you is a guardian, and each one of you will be questioned regarding those under your care. (Al-Bukhārī)

Therefore, men have been commanded by Rasūlullāh ﷺ:

وَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا (البخارى)

I charge you to treat women well. (Al-Bukhārī)

He further elaborates on this point:

...وَخَيْرَكُمْ خَيْرُكُمْ لِنِسَائِهِمْ... (الترمذى)

The best of you is the one who is best to his womenfolk. (At-Tirmidhī)

Good conduct towards women is shown from this ḥadīth to be a measure of a person's worth; Rasūlullāh ﷺ did not say that the best is he who performs an abundance of optional devotions, but highlighted the observance of the rights of women as a true sign of a person's piety.

Even in the instance of a man having a legitimate gri against his wife, Rasūlullāh ﷺ has advised him to remain and level headed:

يُفْرَكُ مُؤْمِنٌ مُؤْمِنَةً إِنْ كَرِهَ مِنْهَا خُلُقًا رَضِيَ مِنْهَا آخَرَ (مسلم)

A believing man should not have hatred for a believing woman: if he dislikes one of her qualities, he will [surely] find another [of her qualities] pleasing. (Muslim)

In this ḥadīth, Rasūlullāh ﷺ is counselling men in n issues. Instead of dwelling on a particular negative qual

one's wife, one should recall all the many good qualities she has. Doing so will develop greater love for her.

The Mother

Motherhood brings with it even more respect and honour. Although Rasūlullāh ﷺ was an orphan, his teachings regarding the status and rights of the mother are explicit. He said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ عُقُوقَ الْأُمَّهَاتِ... (البخارى)

Truly, Allāh has forbidden disobedience to mothers. (Al-Bukhārī)

One's very success in the hereafter is conditional upon honouring and fulfilling the rights of one's mother. He also said:

الْجَنَّةُ تَحْتَ أَقْدَامِ الْأُمَّهَاتِ (الجامع الصغير)

Paradise lies under the feet of mothers. (Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr)

Abū Hurayrah ؓ narrates:

جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَنْ أَحَقُّ بِحُسْنِ صَحَابَتِي؟ قَالَ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ ثُمَّ أَبُوكَ (البخارى)

A man came to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and asked: "Who most deserves my kindness and companionship?" Rasūlullāh ﷺ replied: "Your mother."

"Then who?" asked the man. "Your mother," replied Rasūlullāh ﷺ. "Then who?" asked the man. "Your

كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْتَوِلٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ

Each one of you is a guardian, and each one of you will be questioned regarding those under your care. (Bukhari)

Therefore, men have been commanded by Rasūlullāh ﷺ:

وَأَسْتَوْعِبُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا

I charge you to treat women well. (Bukhari)

He further elaborates on this point:

وَأَحْسَنُكُمْ خَيْرًا كَيْفَ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ ...

The best of you is the one who is best to his womenfolk. (Tirmidhi)

Good conduct towards women is shown from this hadith to be a measure of a person's worth. Rasūlullāh ﷺ did not say that the best is he who performs an abundance of optional devotions, but highlighted the observance of the rights of women as a true sign of a person's piety.

Even in the instance of a man having a legitimate grievance against his wife, Rasūlullāh ﷺ has advised him to remain patient and level headed:

لَا يَفْرَكْ مُؤْمِنٌ مُؤْمِنَةً إِنْ كَرِهَ مِنْهَا خُلُقًا رَضِيَ مِنْهَا آخَرَ

A believing man should not have hatred for a believing woman: if he dislikes one of her qualities, he will [surely] find another [of her qualities] pleasing. (Muslim)

In this hadith, Rasūlullāh ﷺ is counselling men in marital issues. Instead of dwelling on a particular negative quality of

one's wife, one should recall all the many good qualities she has. Doing so will develop greater love for her.

The Mother

Motherhood brings with it even more respect and honour. Although Rasūlullāh ﷺ was an orphan, his teachings regarding the status and rights of the mother are explicit. He said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ غُفُوقَ الْأُمَّهَاتِ ...

Truly, Allāh has forbidden disobedience to mothers. (Bukhari)

One's very success in the hereafter is conditional upon honouring and fulfilling the rights of one's mother. He also said:

الْجَنَّةُ تَحْتَ أَقْدَامِ الْأُمَّهَاتِ ...

Paradise lies under the feet of mothers. (Al-Jāmi' al-Saghir)

Abū Hurayrah ؓ narrates:

جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ مَنْ أَحَقُّ بِحَسَنِي صَبَاحَتِي؟ قَالَ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ قَالَ ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ

A man came to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and asked: "Who most deserves my kindness and companionship?" Rasūlullāh ﷺ replied: "Your mother."

"Then who?" asked the man. "Your mother," replied Rasūlullāh ﷺ. "Then who?" asked the man. "Your

mother," replied Rasūlullāh ﷺ. "Then who?" asked the man. "Your father," replied Rasūlullāh ﷺ. (Al-Bukhārī)

It is difficult to overstate the worth and status that a mother holds in Islām. Muslims, men and women, are taught to serve their parents, treat them with compassion and spend time with them, yet mothers have been awarded higher importance. This is due to the sacrifices a mother undergoes carrying her child for nine months, followed by the pain during childbirth, and thereafter, her caring for the child during the breast feeding period.

Abū Hurayrah's ﷺ Devotion to his Mother

Imām Bukhārī ﷺ, in his *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, has reported a heart-warming incident involving the great Ṣaḥābī Abū Hurayrah ﷺ. Whenever Abū Hurayrah ﷺ intended to enter or leave his house, he would stop at his mother's door and say:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أُمَّتَاهُ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Peace be upon you, O my dear mother, and the mercy of Allāh and his blessings.

His mother would reply:

وَعَلَيْكَ يَا بُنَيَّ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

And upon you, O my dear son, and the mercy of Allāh and his blessings.

He would then say:

رَحِمَكَ اللَّهُ كَمَا رَبَّيْتَنِي صَغِيرًا

May Allāh have mercy on you just as you nurtured me when I was small.

She would in return say:

رَحِمَكَ اللَّهُ كَمَا بَرَرْتَنِي كَبِيرًا

May Allāh have mercy on you just as you treat me with kindness in my old age.

This same mother used to scold him when he first embraced Islām, and according to some narrations, she used to beat him too. Despite this, the teachings of Islām were clear: there are dire warnings for the person who mistreats his/her mother or disobeys her in worldly matters, be she a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Abū Hurayrah ﷺ would bear his mother's remonstrations and be patient because he had embraced Islām and adhered to its teachings.

He once went to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and informed him, crying, of his situation. He asked Rasūlullāh ﷺ to make du'ā for him to be guided. Rasūlullāh ﷺ prayed: "O Allāh, guide the mother of Abū Hurayrah."

Abū Hurayrah ﷺ then rushed home and knocked on his mother's door. His mother told him to wait, for she was bathing. When she had finished, she came out, recited the Kalimah, and became a Muslim. Abū Hurayrah ﷺ returned to Rasūlullāh ﷺ at this time crying out of happiness, and told him the good news that his du'ā had been accepted. (Muslim)

Compassion and Obedience

There are countless examples throughout the history of Islām that embody the Islamic teaching of compassion and obedience towards mothers.

mother," replied Rasūlullāh ﷺ. "Then who?" asked the man. "Your father," replied Rasūlullāh ﷺ. (Bukhārī)

It is difficult to overstate the worth and status that a mother holds in Islām. Muslims, men and women, are taught to serve their parents, treat them with compassion and spend time with them, yet mothers have been awarded higher importance. This is due to the sacrifices a mother undergoes carrying her child for nine months, followed by the pain during childbirth, and thereafter, her caring for the child during the breast feeding period.

Abū Hurayrah's Devotion to his Mother

Imām Bukhārī ﷺ, in his *Al-Adab-al-Mufrad*, has reported a heart-warming incident involving the great Ṣaḥābī Abū Hurayrah ﷺ. Whenever Abū Hurayrah ﷺ intended to enter or leave his house, he would stop at his mother's door and say:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا أُمَّتِي وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Peace be upon you, O my dear mother, and the mercy of Allāh and his blessings.

His mother would reply:

وَعَلَيْكَ يَا بُنَيَّ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

And upon you, O my dear son, and the mercy of Allāh and his blessings.

He would then say:

رَحِمَكَ اللَّهُ كَمَا رَبَّيْتَنِي صَغِيرًا

May Allāh have mercy on you just as you nurtured me when I was small.

She would in return say:

رَحِمَكَ اللَّهُ كَمَا بَرَّيْتَنِي كَبِيرًا

May Allāh have mercy on you just as you treat me with kindness in my old age.

This same mother used to scold him when he first embraced Islām, and according to some narrations, she used to beat him too. Despite this, the teachings of Islām were clear: there are dire warnings for the person who mistreats his/her mother or disobeys her in worldly matters, be she a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Abū Hurayrah ﷺ would bear his mother's remonstrations and be patient because he had embraced Islām and adhered to its teachings.

He once went to Rasūlullāh ﷺ and informed him, crying, of his situation. He asked Rasūlullāh ﷺ to make du'ā for her to be guided. Rasūlullāh ﷺ prayed: "O Allāh, guide the mother of Abū Hurayrah."

Abū Hurayrah ﷺ then rushed home and knocked on his mother's door. His mother told him to wait, for she was bathing. When she had finished, she came out, recited the Kalimah, and became a Muslim. Abū Hurayrah ﷺ returned to Rasūlullāh ﷺ, this time crying out of happiness, and told him the good news that his du'ā had been accepted. (Muslim)

Compassion and Obedience

There are countless examples throughout the history of Islām that embody the Islamic teaching of compassion and obedience towards mothers.

Once, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar ؓ was sitting in the maṭāf in Makkah al-Mukarramah, when a man came to perform the ṭawāf carrying his elderly mother on his back. He said that he was like an obedient camel for his mother, and then asked: “O Ibn ‘Umar! Do you think I have repaid her [for everything she did for me]?” ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar ؓ replied: “No! Not even for one sigh [she gave during childbirth].” (Al-Adab al-Mufrad)

Ḥaywah ibn Shurayḥ ؓ was a great muḥaddith, whose name appears among the chains of narrators found in Imām Bukhārī’s ؓ famous collection of ḥadīth. He would be sitting delivering a ḥadīth lesson in the masjid in front of dozens of students when his elderly mother would walk in and, in front of the whole assembly, say: “O Ḥaywah! Get up and go and feed the chickens!” The eminent muḥaddith would immediately end his lesson and obediently get up and go with his mother.

Shaykh ‘Ubaydullāh Sindhi ؓ was from a Sikh background and later embraced Islām. His mother remained a non-Muslim and used to beat him with a shoe. When people used to marvel at the Shaykh’s submissiveness, he would say that his Lord had commanded him: “...and keep company with them in the world with kindness...” (31:15)

The Invaluable Contribution of the Mother

The maternal role in the history of Islām has been a vital one. Great ‘ulamā and mashā’ikh have had their first schooling in the laps of their mothers. The direction they took in life was a result of the piety of their mothers and the way they were brought up.

Many are the great scholars who lost their fathers at a young age and owed their success to the nurturing and du‘ās of their mothers:

Imām Shāfi‘ī ؓ and his Mother

Imām Shāfi‘ī ؓ was brought up by his mother alone. When, as a child, he would express his desire to leave Makkah to go and study, his mother would start crying. When he asked her whether she was sad at the prospect of her only son moving away, she explained that no, that was not the reason; she was extremely happy that he wanted to go out in search of ‘ilm, but what made her cry was the fact that she was too poor to be able to provide for the expenses and necessities of his journey. When eventually the young Imām Shāfi‘ī ؓ did reach Madīnah, he proved a very able and keen student. He acquired knowledge from Imām Mālik ؓ while in Madīnah Munawwarah. Thereafter, he travelled far and wide to benefit from other well known imāms of the time, before returning to Imām Mālik ؓ in Madīnah again.

When Imām Shāfi‘ī ؓ decided to return to Makkah, his teacher Imām Mālik ؓ, who had been blessed by Allāh ؓ with wealth too, gave him much wealth to return with. Because Imām Shāfi‘ī ؓ had become a faqīh in his own right and achieved widespread recognition and fame, the people of Makkah came out to greet him. On seeing the Imām’s entourage it looked as if it was a merchant rather than a scholar entering the city. There was great happiness all round as the people met Imām Shāfi‘ī ؓ, but he realised there was no sign of happiness on his mother’s face. He asked her why she was sad instead of being

happy upon the return of her son. She replied that she had sent him to become an 'ālim, not to acquire worldly possessions. Encouraged by her behaviour, Imām Shāfi'ī ؒ gave away all the gifts he had returned with to the poor, and thereafter his mother welcomed him home.

Imām Bukhārī ؒ and his Mother

The great muḥaddith Imām Bukhārī ؒ had his mother to thank for his physical and religious upbringing, for he had lost his father while he was still very young. She was responsible for his childhood tarbiyah and moulded his character in the best of manners. Her remarkable piety and closeness to Allāh ؒ can be gauged by an unusual incident that took place in her son's childhood. The young Imām Bukhārī lost his eyesight all of a sudden, causing much grief and anxiety to his mother. She prayed to Allāh ؒ incessantly, asking Him for the well-being of her child. Finally, Allāh ؒ accepted her prayers. One night, she saw Ibrāhīm ؑ in a dream with glad tidings that Allāh ؒ had restored her child's sight due to the blessings and abundance of her prayers. Upon waking, she found that her child had indeed recovered his eyesight.

Shaykh Abul-Ḥasan 'Ali al-Nadwī ؒ and his Mother

The internationally renowned scholar Shaykh Abul-Ḥasan 'Ali al-Nadwī ؒ was deprived of his father at a young age, and his mother played a prominent role in nurturing the excellent qualities in which he later excelled. She was a very learned and pious woman, strongly inclined towards worship, especially

du'ā. It was her great desire that Islām be strengthened and spread through her only son. She once wrote in a letter: "If I had a hundred children, I would give them Dīnī education. I only have you though. May Allāh ؒ grant me the fruits of my good intentions by blessing you with the qualities of a hundred people."

After the death of her husband, she did not allow her love and affection for her son to interfere with his correct upbringing. Shaykh Abul-Ḥasan 'Ali al-Nadwī ؒ, after explaining once how affectionate his mother was towards him, writes: "However, she was very strict regarding two matters: one was ṣalāh; she would not tolerate laziness. If ever I went to sleep without performing 'Ishā Ṣalāh, she would wake me up and make me perform it, no matter how deeply asleep I may have been. Similarly, she would awaken me for Fajr Ṣalāh and send me to the masjid and then sit me down to recite the Qur'ān. The second matter in which she would not compromise, and in which her affection for me would not be a barrier, was how I dealt with the servants' children. If I ever committed any excesses against them or acted proud and looked down on them, she would not only make me apologise but make me beg them for forgiveness. No matter how demeaning it felt to me, she would not relent. That benefited me enormously in my life, and I began to fear the act of being oppressive and arrogant, and regarded hurting the feelings of others as a major sin. And through this training, it became easy for me to admit my mistakes." (Dhikr Khayr)

So, as a result of his mother's du'ās and tarbiyah, Allāh ؒ destined Shaykh Abul-Ḥasan 'Ali al-Nadwī ؒ to become one

of the most prominent Islamic scholars of modern times. His qualities and accomplishments equalled those of not a hundred men, but a thousand, and Allāh ﷺ kept him engaged in the service of Dīn up to his last moments, when he breathed his last while reciting Sūrah Yāsīn on the day of Friday before the Jumu'ah Ṣalāh.

True Worth

Women acquire real respect and honour through Islām. As her roles in society increase, so increases the respect with which she is regarded. Every woman is a daughter, and that in itself ensures honour and dignity. Thereafter she may be a daughter and sister; a daughter, sister and wife; or a daughter, sister, wife and mother. Each consecutive stage increases her status in society, as well as giving her greater contentment of heart. The preceding examples from the sīrah and teachings of Rasūlullāh ﷺ go some way to demonstrate this point.

Men and women are equal in the eyes of Allāh ﷻ; both have rights and responsibilities and both must be treated with honour and respect. It can be confidently claimed that a woman who lives her life in the light of the Qur'ān and Sunnah will have more contentment and peace of heart than any other woman in the world.

To understand this properly, we must understand that the honour that comes from the 'freedom' we hear about so much in the media is not really honour, but a mirage. It is exploitation of women. Allāh ﷻ, the most compassionate and most merciful, has granted women real honour through Islām.

It finally remains to say that the honour, leniency and ease that Allāh ﷻ has gifted women with should be acknowledged. Muslim women should understand their true worth and the immense potential they have. And as with any favour, they should strive to show their gratitude to the Giver of the favour by submitting to His Will and striving to develop His love in their hearts.

The status of women in Islām is a subject poorly understood in today's world. Misconceptions and misunderstandings abound, and even many Muslims, due to a lack of adequate Islamic knowledge, fail to understand the issue correctly.

In this booklet, the renowned Islamic scholar and spiritual mentor Shaykh-ul- Ḥadīth Shaykh Muḥammad Saleem Dhorat *ḥa fīzahullāh* presents readers with an insight into the subject from the authentic Islamic viewpoint. The respected Shaykh explains the true status of women in light of the Qur'ān and Sunnah and the Sīrah of our beloved Prophet ﷺ.